

Pre-verbal Communication – Attention & Listening

Information for patients, relatives and
carers

December 2023

What is attention and listening?

Attention is focusing on a person or object. Children's attention skills normally begin with paying attention to people then to objects.

Listening involves hearing words or sounds then thinking about them and their meaning. Sometimes children can hear what you are saying but aren't really listening.

Why is attention and listening important?

Attention is important because children need to focus and pay attention so they can learn new skills e.g. communication and interaction.

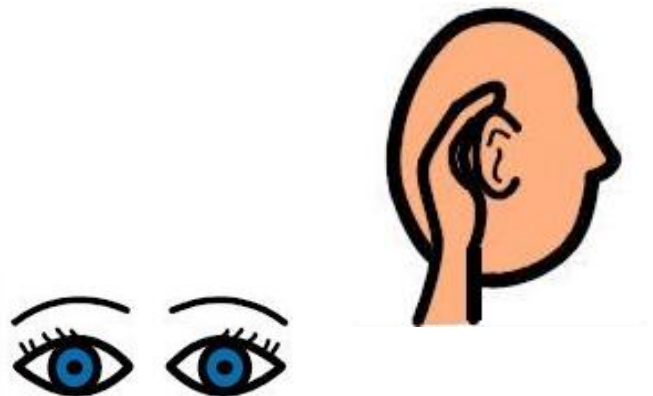
Listening is important because children need to be able to listen to sounds that make up words so that they can understand them. Sounds can sometimes sound similar to each other, so children will need to practise listening to a range of sounds to develop their language learning skills.

Below are advice and general strategies that can help to develop these skills:

- Turn off background distractions such as the TV or other electronic devices (e.g. smart phone, tablet, computer etc.) as much as possible and definitely before carrying out any one-to-one interaction
- Your child will be more likely to take part if you keep games short!
- Your child will be more likely to pay attention and listen to you if you choose a toy or activity that interests your child!
- Your child will be more likely to take part if they are enjoying themselves!
- Take your child on a 'listening walk' and encourage your child to listen to the different sounds that you hear while out and about (e.g. birds, vehicles)

Activities to try at home:

- ☐ 1. Ready... Steady... Go! Games
- ☐ 2. Noisy Toys
- ☐ 3. Nursery Rhymes



Ready... Steady... Go! Games

- Pick a fun game to play with your child e.g. playing on a swing, knocking over bricks, rolling a ball or even bubbles
- Start saying “ready... steady...” and encourage your child to listen for “go” at you when you say “go!” and start the action
- You can use their name to get their attention
- You could try other “ready... steady... go!” games e.g. “ready... steady... jump!” or “ready... steady... boo!”



Noisy Toys

- Collect lots of different ‘noisy’ toys which make different noises e.g. bells, rattles, squeaky toys and bunch of keys
- Encourage your child to play with the noisy toys and listen to the different sounds
- You can make some noisy instruments with household items. E.g. wooden spoons, plastic cups, saucepans etc.
- Encourage your child to listen to the sounds made and maybe even try to copy a simple rhythm that you play
- Listen to the sounds together



Nursery Rhymes

- Pick a song that your child is familiar with and enjoys e.g. *Humpty Dumpty*, *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* or *Ring A Ring of Roses*
- Encourage your child to listen to the action words in the song (like “fall down” in *Ring A Ring of Roses*) before performing the action (i.e. falling down to the floor)
- You can deliberately leave out the last word of the song for your child to fill in, or even use the wrong word and see if your child responds e.g. “Humpty Dumpty sat on a... cat”



How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have.

If you have any suggestions or comments about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on 0191 445 6129 (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday).

You can also email PALS at ghnt.pals.service@nhs.net

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Mrs Trudie Davies,
Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust,
Trust Headquarters,
Queen Elizabeth Hospital,
Sheriff Hill,
Gateshead,
NE9 6SX

The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website ([Privacy - QE Gateshead](#)) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net.

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